

OPERA RESPONDS TO NEW TENDENCIES OF THE STAGE

A Musical Dawn.

"Babette" a Promise of Real Opera Comique — Mme. Schumann-Heink to Follow Fritz Scheff.

THE horizon of musical art is brightening. No one who heard Mme. Fritz Scheff in "Babette" could doubt it. So good an opera so capably performed is an experience to remember gratefully and recall hopefully. Hereafter the characteristic musical comedy of the period will be less terrible.

"Babette" is a fine example of pure opera comique, and opera comique is an art form as undoubtedly as comic opera is not. It is a fair illustration of the first truths of musical criticism.

That the purpose of artistic opera music is to illustrate and vitalize the text of the opera; that unless it does so, opera music is an absurdity; that the standard must be beautiful, not merely light; that the key to an opera is the libretto and that if the libretto is weak or incongruous the music is likely to be poor, and that stage settings, costumes, "beauty" girls and comedy are lesser qualities than text, plot and music.

So it is no wonder the engagement proved a practical success. Day after day the National was crowded. Performance after performance was applauded until the work was sung through twice for one price of admission. "Babette" might even have remained here two weeks instead of one. Wherever it goes in America it will surely meet with the same support, for all America has been overthrown with musical comedy like Washington.

The Light Breaks.

Mlle. Fritz Scheff, Mr. Herbert, Mr. Smith, and Mrs. Dillingham are not to stand alone, fortunately. It has been known for some time that the most incomparable mezzo-soprano now to be heard in America, Mme. Schumann-Heink, would also appear in opera comique, and recently the details of the plan have leaked out.

Fred C. Winters is to be the manager, an arguer that every detail of investment, costuming and equipment will be skillfully and generously supplied. The music is to be by Julian Edwards, who may rise to the opportunity and surpass Mr. Herbert. In any event, it will not do to produce his. One of the books is to be submitted by Stanislaus Stange and Mme. Schumann-Heink is to have a role chiefly marked by comedy. The opening is to be made in New York, as early next season as proves expedient, at the New Amsterdam Theater.

What a prospect is this! One of the most notable voices in the history of American musical art directed to comic opera, a capable musician at work diligently on a score worthy of such a voice, and an enterprising and artistic manager undertaking every obligation to mount the work appropriately.

But the list is not yet exhausted. It is understood DeWolf Hopper, whose impersonation of Mr. Pickwick developed an unsuspected capacity for character impersonation, will undertake the role of Falstaff in a new opera to be built about the life of the great humorist. Francis Wilson is said to have in view an opera of genuine musical worth. Finally, a dozen or more of the young women who are now starring in musical comedy are all on the lookout for opportunity to sing roles as conspicuous as that of Babette.

Material Going to Waste.

This reaction from musical comedy will probably wait on the composition of new opera. Following much the same course of reasoning as that which debarred Shakespeare from the stage, theatrical managers have of late refused to read any of the classics when a second or third rate new work could be had. Accordingly such works as these will likely be neglected.

Offenbach's "Orpheus," a satire on Gluck's "Orpheus en Enfer," "The Sorcerer," by Gilbert and Sullivan; an old German work, "Maurer und Schlosser," ("Mason and Locksmith"); Benedetti's "Lily of Killarney"; Aubert's well-known "Fra Diavolo"; Von Suppe's "Crown of Diamonds"; "Poet and Peasant," and "Light Cavalry"; Flotow's "Stradella" and "Martha"; Donizetti's "Daughter of the Regiment" and "Elixir of Love"; De Koven's "Rob Roy"; Moeller's "Peggy Student"; Rossini's "Barber of Seville"; Humperdinck's "Hansel and Gretel"; Mozart's "Magic Flute"; "Marriage of Figaro" and "Belmont and Constance"; and Wagner's "Meistersinger."

The list is too long to be passed over for any more such operas as "The Magic Kiss." Yet it will not do to attack any one of these notable works with no better a company than that which supported Camille D'Arville in the unhappy work indicated. "Poet and Peasant," "Hansel and Gretel," and "The Magic Flute" need to be sung, not shouted. As has been said of them in these columns before, the average comic opera company or musical comedy company of today would wrestle with one of them and die. A fourth of the contraltos, half the sopranos, two-thirds of the basses, and all the baritone and tenors would never even attempt their score. To this low musical level has comic opera come.

Even an indulgent public, trust-ridden and quiescent, could not endure such a situation. Every critic worthy of the name has cried out against this trampling of the top of his throat until the least intelligent theatergoer has been made to feel that something was wrong. Thinking men everywhere gave support to the protest. The consequence was that the managers heard quickly and have now reformed generously. All reports to the contrary notwithstanding, theatrical managers hear calls for better art with most willing ears. They are, in fact, more pleased than anyone else at such a movement as has now filed their theaters with Shakespeare and threaten to drive most of the abortive operas of the stage.

Opera Comique—Not Real Opera.

The prospect inspired by these reflections is so pleasant and the reflections themselves give so much pleasure to the pen which sets them down, that The Times and its readers are in some danger of thinking too well of "Babette," the text from which his sermon was preached.

It should not be thought that "Babette" leaves nothing to be desired in opera comique. The work is far from ideal. Perhaps, after all, its great success depends on its star, a woman of rare vocal accomplishments and pronounced personal charm. Its music, although a marked advance over that of

"A Chinese Honeymoon," is not, by any means, great, and is hardly distinguished. It has the word "popular" written at the top of every page. It was, in all probability, deliberately planned to meet the better "popular" taste, as the composer estimated that taste. It has succeeded in doing exactly that, but no more. As every bar manifested Mr. Herbert's training as conductor of a fine orchestra, the very best music of the work was that written for the instruments alone. But the opera, as when all is said, undoubtedly the best light opera since "Robin Hood."

We must not forget, any of us, the real position of such writings as "Babette." Opera is the most popular form of musical entertainment. Opera comique is the most popular form of opera. In opera the comprehension of music is made easy to the fullest degree by the help of pictures and words. In comic opera this comprehension is further aided by palpable expression of emotion and broad humor. But this kind of opera is manifestly not the highest field of music. The only opera which is entirely artistic is that which Beethoven and Wagner described, and which the latter aimed to write—a union of music, poetry, painting and action, all welded in the expression of uplifting thought. Even the best opera comique tends lamely enough toward such ideals. If such opera is necessary, let us keep it on as high a plane as we can.

A. D. A.

At the Theaters.

National—Joseph Jefferson.

Joseph Jefferson has not yet made up his mind to retire from the stage. He is not thinking of such a thing. There is no young and successful actor of the day who brings as much enthusiasm to the practice of his art as Mr. Jefferson does—none who shows his youth so convincingly—none who can create a laugh or coax a tear so easily and gracefully. And yet, Mr. Jefferson, who will begin an engagement at the National Theater tomorrow night, presenting Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights and the Saturday matinee "Rip Van Winkle," on Wednesday and Friday nights "The Rivals," and on Saturday night the double bill of "Lend Me Five Shillings" and "The Cricket on the Hearth," has given over sixty years of hard, conscientious work to the theater, playing during that time hundreds of different parts and for nearly half a century being a favorite and conspicuous figure on the American stage.

He is the dean of the profession in this country and the foremost and most genuinely representative of all American artists. His long and brilliant career makes it possible for him to retire at any time with distinction and with the affection and well wishes of a vast public which has grown to love as well as to admire him, but this public will be sorry to see him go, for it will mean that dear old Rip Van Winkle and the Saturday matinee "Rip Van Winkle" and Golightly will have disappeared from the scene forever, as they belong inseparably to Mr. Jefferson, and no artist will ever again endear them to theatergoers' hearts as he has done.

Besides Rip and Bob Acres he includes Caleb Plummer of "The Cricket on the Hearth," and Golightly of "Lend Me Five Shillings" in his repertoire this season. There is a universal and enormous demand for Rip-theatergoers.

Chase's—Vaudeville.

The bill this week at Chase's promises much entertainment to patrons of that

Empire—"The Minister's Daughters."

"The Minister's Daughters," Leonard Grover's latest comedy drama, will be presented at the Empire tomorrow and the rest of the week. It is said to be brimful of intensely sensational situations and replete with realism. The plot deals with the wild and tempestuous life of an innocent young country girl and several equally as guileless rural companions in the dive district of New York, and after giving the audience an insight into the Bovey district of the great city, it transports you to the country homestead in New York, where the play ends with the usual virtue triumphant. Sensation being the fad of the hour in this strenuous age, rapidity of action is demanded by the sight-seeing public. The acme of perfection in thrilling and strenuous action is to be found in "The Minister's Daughters." This is a play abounding in striking climaxes and scenic effects, a plethora of sensation to feast the eye and ear. The scenery and mechanical effects are described as the best, and the company has been carefully selected for its fitness to each character.

Lyceum—"Imperial Burlesquers."

The Lyceum will present during the ensuing week Harry W. Williams, Jr.'s, Imperial Burlesquers. The two sketches will be called "His Sporty Wife" and "Off to the Front." The company includes Frank Byron, Cliff Gordon, Byrre and Langdon, Patti Carney, Evans and St. John, Johnnie Cain and Snitz Moore, Edna Ulline and Grace Forrest Burke, the Sheldon Sisters, and a chorus of twenty-five.

Tasca's Italian Band. Tasca's Italian band, known in Europe as King Humbert's Royal Artillery Band, will make its initial appearance in this city at the Columbia this afternoon and evening. This is the first American tour of this bandmaster, and he and his band come recommended most highly. Tasca's control over his bandmen is said to be marvelous.

Tasca is thirty-eight years old. After a tour of Europe, he was brought before the King and was made director of the Royal Artillery Band, and has since been the conductor of that organization. The programs for the two Washington concerts are given below. Afternoon at 3-March, "Tannhauser," by Wagner; overture, "Zanetta," by Aubert; prelude, "Cavalleria Rusticana," by Mascagni; soprano solo, selected, Mme. Cissarano; "American Girl," two-step, by Tasca; overture, "Schizara Saracena," by Mercadante; prelude, Dance of the Hours, from "Glaucunda," Poncehella; tenor solo, selected, Signor C. Fortunato; act III from "Glaucunda," Poncehella; "American Patrol," March.

Evening program—March, "Sinfonia," by Costantino; overture, "William Tell," with phenomenal tempest, by Rossini;



SCENE IN "MARTA OF THE LOWLANDS," LAFAYETTE OPERA HOUSE.

Columbia—"Mam'selle Napoleon."

In the most elaborately staged and costumed play with which her name has ever been attached, Anna Held, under the direction of F. Ziegfeld, Jr., comes to the Columbia Theater tomorrow night for one week. Jean Richepin's play, "Mam'selle Napoleon," adapted for the American stage by Joseph Herbert, and provided with music by Gustave Ludes, is the attraction.

Miss Held this season will have a fine opportunity of displaying her personal charms in conjunction with a native dramatic ability she has never before manifested. In the role of "Mlle. Mars" she is called upon to exploit her dramatic qualifications, and that she has scored in Philadelphia, with the most hypercritical audiences, is evidence that she has the ability.

The production is said to be brilliant and beautiful. The scenes, all of them being laid in the most brilliant period of the Napoleonic regime—offered many opportunities for originality in staging and producing, and the result is said to be a triumph for all connected with the production.

In support of Miss Held are Joseph Herbert, Dan McAvoy, Frank Rushworth, Arthur Hickman, Henry Bergman, Franz Ebert, Mme. Mathilde Cotterly, Adelaide Orton, Billy Norton, the McCoy Sisters, Edith Myer, Nina Kaul, Edna Goodrich and a chorus which aggregates 125 persons.

Academy—"From Rags to Riches."

"From Rags to Riches," Charles A. Taylor's melodrama, comes to the Academy tomorrow night, under the direction of Charles L. Wells and Maxwell L. Meyers. The play is written in four acts and seven scenes, depicting life in New York city. The play presents the boy actor, Joseph Santley, as Ned Nimble, a newboy, who rises from the gutter to a position of affluence. Master Santley is said to be an actor of wonderful talent. The younger portion of the theatergoing public, as well as the elders, appreciate his excellent work, and his matinee houses are always filled with women and children. "From Rags to Riches" gives Master Santley a better opportunity for a display of his talent than anything he has heretofore undertaken. The play is said to be exciting and entertaining.

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"Pas de Fleurs," by Moses; celebrated organ offertory, by Baptiste; "American Girl," two-step, by Tasca; overture, "Tannhauser," by Wagner; tenor solo, selected, by Signor C. Fortunato; selection, "King Dodo," Ludes; sextette "Lucia," by Donizetti; soloists, Sig. Antonelli-Del Arciprete, Salomone, Vespe, Concone, Calcevalchi; "Stephen Foster," by Tognoli.

The box office will be open from 11 o'clock Sunday morning.

Burton Holmes Lectures.

The popularity of the Burton Holmes lectures in this city at the Columbia is beyond question, while the fact that he has his entire season booked in the large cities of this country goes to show that his popularity is by no means local. Although Mr. Holmes is but slightly over thirty-two years old, this is his tenth season as a professional lecturer. In speaking of his life work Mr. Holmes states briefly that it is his love of travel and his desire to see all the accessible portions of the globe, that has led him to choose his present career. He wishes merely to be eyes and ears for those, less fortunate, who are obliged to stay at home, and he modestly refers to his achievements as a traveler and lecturer as "my travel-talks," or "my chair journeys."

The series for the present season is the first in Mr. Holmes' repertoire to be exclusively American in subject, and the title, "From Broadway to Behring Sea," suggests a wide variety, as well as a patriotic desire to exploit the beauties of our own land. The opening lecture Tuesday afternoon is "The Yosemite Valley."

Fernanda Elisca.

Gifted Young Actress the Heroine of "Marta of the Lowlands."

No small measure of the popularity of "Marta of the Lowlands" is said to be due to the unusually brilliant work of Fernanda Elisca, who took the title part at short notice owing to the retirement of Miss Riccardo from the cast, and at

Miss George's part during the illness of that actress; Lazzerillo in "Don Caesar's Return," with James K. Hackett, playing the part of Maritimo during Florence Kahn's illness; and she also appeared at Mrs. Osborn's playhouse last season as Juliet with the Elizabethan players. After that she was featured as Juliet, and as the princess in "Prince Otto" in a Philadelphia stock company. When she was called upon to play Marta of the Lowlands, she was quick to acknowledge that she shows genius—a somewhat rare quality on the stage today, especially among the younger actors.

Mrs. Fiske's New Play.

"Mary of Magdala," in which Mrs. Fiske will be seen in this city in the course of her present tour, is exciting the same admiration in the cities in which she is appearing that marked its long term in New York. It is everywhere accepted as perhaps the most elaborate and artistically beautiful production of the modern stage, while in the acting it proves fully as satisfying as in material matters. To theatergoers who have never seen Mrs. Fiske except in the more prosaic roles with which her fame is associated, her appearance in the part of Mary of Magdala, which is cast in its dignity and poetic, yet powerfully dramatic, in its scope, is said to be a revelation. Her impersonation is said to embody one of the most impressive examples of acting that the stage of today can show, and to give ground for the highest expectation as to her when she appears as Lady Macbeth, as she purposes to do, in a splendid production of "Macbeth" next season.

"Rip" No Blue Ribboner.

Some Things Mr. Jefferson Told Harriet Beecher Stowe and Another Woman.

Joseph Jefferson has had an interesting and eventful career on the stage for over sixty years. A number of happy incidents connected with the stage, but off it, crowd his memory; and perhaps the pleasantest and most fragrant of these are associated with his great success, "Rip Van Winkle." Two anecdotes from his "autobiography" will suffice to show the general nature of the incidents that he loves to recall.

"While acting once in Boston I received a note from the publisher of the 'Atlantic Monthly,' to know if I would call at the publishing house to meet Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. It seems the lady had been at the theater where I had acted the night before, and in a note to the publisher had expressed a desire to see me. We had a long and, to me, a very pleasant chat. In speaking of her visit to the theater, she was struck with the scene in which Rip meets with his daughter, and that it reminded her of the situation between Lear and Cordelia. I told her that the scene was undoubtedly modeled on the one from Shakespeare, and perhaps the white hair and beard floating about the head of the old Knickerbocker had some share in this likeness. She said she was sure that I could play Lear. I was sorry to differ from a lady, but I told her I was quite sure that I could not.

"Shortly after this I met another lady of equal intelligence, who seemed much interested in Rip Van Winkle. Among the many questions she asked was how I could act the character so often and not tire of it. I told her that I had always been strangely interested



ANNA HELD.

once scored a remarkable success. By the way, an erroneous impression has gone abroad regarding the career of Miss Elisca, of whom much may be expected in the future. It has been said that Miss Elisca was a member of the company when she was called upon to take this important part, and that she was a recent graduate of a dramatic school, both of which statements are erroneous. Miss Elisca has played prominent parts in various productions for some four years, although, as it often happens, the role of Marta has served to greatly distinguish her, because it appears to have all at once shown her possibilities.

Miss Elisca acted Michah Daw in "The Little Minister" with Maude Adams; leading part in support of Grace George, in "Her Majesty," afterward playing

higher compliment, for it shows how great an interest they take in an animal that has never been exhibited. No one, "hold the mirror up to nature" if you like, but don't hold nature—a reflection of the thing, but not the thing itself. How badly would a drunken man give an exhibition of intoxication on the stage? Who shall act a madman but one who is perfectly sane? We must not be natural but appear to be so.

"One question more, and I have done. Why do you not refuse the cup that Gretchen offers you at the end of the play?"

"To which I replied: Should Rip refuse the cup the drama would become at once a temperance play. This subject has both its adherents and its opponents, and has, moreover, of late become a political question. The action would have a local and even a modern flavor. I would as soon expect to hear of Cinderella striking for high wages, or of a speech on woman's rights from old Mother Hubbard as to listen to a temperance lecture from Rip Van Winkle; it would take all the poetry and fairy tale element completely out of it. I would prefer the impression on the audience as the curtain falls should be suggestive, so that they might terminate it in a manner most agreeable to themselves. Let us not suppose in the end that Rip and his wife get ill, send for a doctor, take pills, and die, but that they stay healthy and Joan by the fireside and eventually get up the chimney in the smoke. If Rip Van Winkle had been treated in a realistic manner it never would have lived as long."

Patti in Baltimore.

The engagement of Madame Adeline Patti, at the New Maryland Theater, Baltimore, on Monday, November 23, promises to be the best of her tour. Many Washingtonians have signified their intention of going over by having seats put aside at the ticket office of the Lafayette Square Theater. The official sale will not open until next Wednesday, but all those having made application for boxes and seats can obtain same on Monday at the Lafayette Theater. This arrangement was made by James L. Kernan, who guaranteed the famous "diva" \$12.00 for her appearance in Baltimore, in order to avoid a rush for tickets at the opening sale on Wednesday. The new Maryland Theater will seat 2,500 people and it is safe to say that every available space will be occupied. Many members of the diplomatic circles are going.

"The Pit" on the Stage.

Whatever relates to Channing Pollock in his career as dramatic critic, press agent, and now—dramatist, must be of interest to the many friends of the brilliant young playwright here in Washington. His dramatization of the late lamented Frank Norris' novel, "The Pit," had its first production in Hartford, Conn., last Monday night, and it is pleasant to be able to recall that it achieved a notable success. The critics counsel the application of the pruning knife to certain portions of the play, but otherwise are outspoken in praise of it. Additional interest in "The Pit" is derived from the fact that Washington man—Wilton Lackaye—takes the principal part, that of Curtis Jadin.

An All-Star Cast.

Sir A. Conan Doyle, Jerome K. Jerome, and Israel Zangwill in "Merely Mary Ann."

Sir A. Conan Doyle, Jerome K. Jerome, and Israel Zangwill—there's the nucleus of an "all-star" cast that should outdazzle any array of stage luminaries now in the theatrical heavens. This trio of famous authors, together with a number of other well-known literary men, appeared a few nights ago in a performance of "Merely Mary Ann," given for purposes of copyright at the Corn Exchange, Wallingford, England. "Merely Mary Ann" is the Israel Zangwill comedy in which Eleanor Robson has just scored such conspicuous success at the Garrick Theater, Chicago.

In its entirety the notable English cast was as follows: Peter, Jerome K. Jerome; Herr Brahmsen, Israel Zangwill; Rev. Samuel Smedge, Sir A. Conan Doyle; Lancelot, Ernest Henham; O'Gorman, George Jenkins; Jim Blues, Harold Crichton; Lord Valentine Foxwell, Fred Miller; Mrs. Leadbetter, Blanche Maine; Rosie, Olga Hentschel; Polly, Elsie Morris; Kitty, Nora; Cook, Lady Chelmer, Henrietta Stanley; Countess of Foxwell, Winnie Shoreland; Hon. Rowena Fitzgibbon, Rowena Jerome, and Mary Ann, Elsie Steel.

Israel Zangwill acted as stage manager, and Sir A. Conan Doyle was the property boy.

The Stage and Rest.

An Ohio Clergyman Takes a Bold Stand on the Subject.

The Rev. Dr. Morgan Wood, of the Cleveland (Ohio) Plymouth Congregational Church, preached a Sunday sermon to his congregation last Sunday night, in the course of which he urged his hearers to attend the theater. His words touching theatricals were reported in the "Cleveland Leader," as follows:

"The animal, the material, is prevailing in our life today. In our cafes you will find the animal enjoyment prevailing. Never was there a time when the playhouses, the vaudeville theaters, were as prosperous as now. There is no place for the Shakespearean drama. It is attempted with nothing but misgivings. Legitimate actors and actresses are deserting the legitimate for the vaudeville stage.

"Thinking is just what we don't want. That's why the stage of the Empire. I've had enough of the tragedy of life all day; you say when we suggest seeing 'Hamlet' at the Opera House, and I want to forget myself. It would do you church people good to go to Chase's Empire once in a while—not as often as I go, perhaps—but it is clean as far as I can see; it's all right, and it would give you sweeter dispositions.

"We are all in the dangerous position of entering into the struggle for supremacy, into the battle of greed. I don't care what a man's vocation, every night he is tired and dead after a day's struggle for advancement in position, increase in wealth, or battle for supremacy with his fellow men.

"We're burning the candle at both ends in this materialistic life of ours, where there is no room for poets.

In the past, and, fearing that I might eventually grow weary of it, I had of late arranged my seasons that I would have a few months, and took long rests, a rest between them, but that my great stimulus, of course, was public spirit, and the knowledge that it must mean if I flagged in my duties, I was selected to give entire attention to the work while it was progressing.

"Another question, please. Why don't you have a day in the play?"

"I replied that I disliked realism in art, and remain alive, with a tail to wag at the wrong time, would be absurd."

"Don't you think the public would like to see Schneider?"

"The public could not pay him a